

## **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

Fiscal Year 2009

### Introduction

The Town of Amherst experienced a challenging financial environment for FY 09, the period from July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009. The structural deficit was well documented with the predominant condition of expense growth exceeding the community's ability to generate revenue. The focus throughout the year was to identify and implement systems that would generate additional revenue or to provide opportunities for greater efficiencies or effectiveness. The following is designed to provide a summary of the major actions and themes pursued throughout the year.

### Town Manager's Report

The effort to regionalize emergency dispatch service began with the convening of a meeting with many of the region's communities and the University of Massachusetts Amherst to discuss the potential to collaborate on this important service. After receiving a positive indication from the participants, I formally proposed legislation to Senator Stan Rosenberg to amend the authorizing legislation that allows for deep subsidies for the creation and operation of regional dispatch centers to allow the University of Massachusetts Amherst to participate as a municipality. Senator Rosenberg's advocacy was successful and the University was given formal status to participate in such an eligible regional effort. A grant in the amount of \$125,000.00 was prepared, submitted and awarded to study the feasibility of a region that would include ten (10) area towns and the University. A firm from Virginia was selected to conduct the study. It would appear that the goal to create a regional dispatch center to improve upon the service and to dramatically reduce the cost of said service is achievable.

The centralization of the core Inspection and Planning services was completed in 2009. The merger of the Inspections Department and the Office of Community Development into the Planning and Conservation Office allows for the sharing of essential and related services into one office suite. That change in geography along with the introduction of a mutual data base and software platform creates a one-stop shopping environment that improves customer service with the delivery of coordinated support services such as clerical, reception, copy and meeting space. The improvement has resulted in the dramatic reduction in back log of building permit issuance, and zoning violation complaint handling. With the blending of the Community Development Office into the department, many of the support requirements are readily available, thereby increasing the speed and quality of Community Development Services. Sharing clerical services has allowed for a reduced employee count without a discernable reduction in service.

The creation of the Kendrick Park Committee was completed in FY 09. That committee was charged with the exciting task of gathering community input and creating a document that outlines recommendations for how to proceed with the newly acquired three and one half (3 ½) acre park in downtown Amherst. The Kendrick Park Committee, chaired by Peg Roberts, visited a recently created urban park in Keene, New Hampshire. The committee conducted surveys, created focus groups and even held a pizza party to entice young people to engage in the process.

to create a vision for the park. The next step is to secure an architect to prepare plans and cost estimates consistent with the committee's vision and to prepare plans and cost estimates for the grant writing process.

A grant was secured by the Health Department to study and identify opportunities to teach and improve social justice conditions as caused by the delivery of municipal services. The purpose of the grant was to provide education to department heads and employees about those conditions that perpetuate conditions detrimental to social justice. A Social Justice Committee was formed by the staff and a full day seminar was conducted for department heads to explain the concept in detail and to outline those activities that might provide for a greater level of social justice. This innovative concept has important implications for the citizens that we serve and I am proud to be a part of an organization that places such an activity as a top priority.

The budget process and the lack of resources dominated the day to day operation of the Town. Although I did not focus on that topic, it is hard to overemphasize its significance to the organization and community. The entire Amherst team devoted many hours to the task at hand and successfully implemented the many changes needed to balance the budget. Without the hard work and dedication of all Town staff, this great achievement would not be possible. I owe our team a debt of gratitude.

Laurence Shaffer  
Town Manager